



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Checks & Balances Are Vital to Successful Governing

By State Representative Don Vruwink

Successful governments are based on compromise. The United States Constitution was built on compromise. Large and small states, slave-holding and free states, exports and imports ... all of these issues and interests had to be negotiated. It took three months to write three pages in Philadelphia at Constitutional Hall. Delegates persevered in the heat of the summer to forge this great document.

State constitutions followed the federal model of checks and balances and an independent judiciary. Checks and balances were also key in the development of the state budget bill that recently passed the Wisconsin Legislature. Republicans, Democrats and independents all offered their criticisms and praises on various items in the budget. Different people and different groups wanted more of this or less of that.

When the Legislature and Executive Branch are controlled by different political parties, it is sometimes called “divided government.” I call it “shared government.” From my perspective, this is how government should work. No one should be entirely upset nor entirely happy.

One of the things I liked in the budget bill was the 7.1 percent increase in funding for health services. This means long-term care providers and nursing homes will finally get a boost in reimbursement rates.

Public defenders got a much-needed 17 percent pay increase after having the lowest pay in the nation. Workforce development received a 14.7 percent increase to help address the worker shortage and skills gap. Finally, the budget was able to raise per-pupil spending from \$704 to \$742 through the use of the governor’s veto power.

The budget falls short beginning with the refusal of the Joint Finance Committee to accept federal funds that would allow us to provide more health services through Medicaid. By

accepting federal funds, Wisconsin would save nearly \$325 million of our hard-earned tax dollars.

The budget also falls short by not providing the \$17 million the governor proposed for promoting tourism. The Joint Finance Committee cut that to \$11 million. Tourism numbers show that for every dollar spent in promotion, we get \$7 back in tax revenue.

The budget falls short in broadband expansion. The Governor proposed \$78 million over the biennium but the final budget provided \$48 million. Broadband is needed to keep rural areas vibrant. Without access to reliable high-speed Internet, our businesses, farmers, and students are at a competitive disadvantage and they will be left behind.

Some of the things I wish were included in the budget were eliminated. The Governor proposed \$400,000 for farm-to-school grants that would have promoted production of Wisconsin-grown food for sale to Wisconsin schools.

Second, only one new position for the UW School of Agriculture was filled while others were left vacant. Finally, I would have liked to see a bold initiative for student loan relief and non-partisan redistricting.

Gov. Evers signed the state budget bill on July 3rd in the Governor's Conference Room. I was there and was happy he signed it. The Governor quoted a line inscribed in the ceiling of that room: "The progress of a state is born in temperance, justice and prudence."

The Governor exercised prudence, using his veto power sparingly. He pledged to continue the fight to accept federal Medicaid funds, restore two-thirds funding of schools, and change the way we do re-districting.

The budget did not fulfill all of my priorities, nor did it fulfill all of the priorities of people on the other side of the aisle. The Governor could have vetoed the budget bill entirely but he chose a moderate path, and that's the way shared government works.

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State Rep. Don Vruwink represents parts of Rock, Walworth, Jefferson, and Dane counties. These include the communities of Whitewater, Milton, Edgerton, Footville, the Town of Janesville, part of the Village of Oregon, and surrounding townships. He can be reached at 608-266-3790, Rep.Vruwink@legis.wisconsin.gov, and P.O. Box 8953, Madison WI 53708.